

## [Mrs. Emma Falconer]

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Life History

FOLKLORE:

Miss Effie Cowan, P. W.

McLennan County, Texas

District No. 8.

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Interview with Mrs. Emma Falconer, Marlin, Texas.

"I was born in Green County, Mississippi, in the year 1850. My parents were Theodore and Mary Shaw. My mother died when I was ten years old and I went to live with my paternal grandmother, who was the wife of Judge D. C. Shaw. She was a cousin of Captain Willis Lang who came to Texas in the days before the Civil War and settled on a plantation on the Brazos bottom near the then little village of Waco. I came to this plantation with my husband in 1886 to live, he, being a nephew of Captain Long. You will therefore see why later in my narrative I can give you quite a lot of information about this Captain Lang who was related to me thro' my grandmother as well as to my husband.

"My grandmother lived in Wayne County, Mississippi, near the Chickasahay river. The town of Winchester was the county seat, and when the Court was in session the

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attendants and the lawyers stopped at her house. This place was famous for its southern hospitality and for its excellent food. My grandparents had to send by wagon train to Mobile for their supplies as it took large quantities to take care of their needs. When the Mobile and Ohio railroads finally came through our town, the whole population of the town and country were at the station to see the first train come in. I can remember how kind hearted conductors would give ice to families who had sickness from their own ice they used for drinking water. Many times they gave help in long spells of fever in this way.

“Beside the plantation my grandfather owned a leather factory where he made all kinds of leather goods, from saddles, bridles, and harness to shoes, boots and leather jackets and hats. C-12. Texas. 2 When the War between the States came, he made them for the government, or the soldiers of the Confederate army. I will tell you about the things that we lived thro' in the war times, but first I will tell you about the homes, customs and characteristics of the southern people prior to this war.

“The twenty years before this war between the States, or the Civil War, were the most prosperous years the South had experienced. I was eleven years old when it started and so in my own memory it stands out clearly in my early life. With the assistance of the slave labor and the rich soil, as well as the high prices for their produce the plantation owners lived in luxury and many raked large fortunes. It is true that today we have many luxuries which we did not have in that time, on the other hand, there were many things that is beyond the reach of most of us today that were thought nothing of in that day. Most of the parents, both man and women had the advantage of European travel and education. They had slaves for all their work, even to the bodyguard for the master and the maids for the women. They enjoyed all the advantages of the pleasures of the theaters in the cities close to them, and both the young men and women had much more time for cultivating their musical, literary or other talents than they do now.

“The commerce of the towns on the Mississippi and those in the state was sent by way of the Mississippi to New Orleans and Memphis Tennessee to the market. New Orleans had

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the largest market on account of the ships from the ports of Europe docking here with 3 their commerce and also taking the produce of the country back to Europe. The coasting crafts from New York, New England and Baltimore also lined the river front. Negroes sang as they rolled hogsheads of sugar and bales of cotton on board these ships. The day of industry had dawned for the south.

“On the plantations the families of the American planters were growing up, the young men and women were dissatisfied with the little simple dwellings of their forefathers, so this was the day the fine old colonial mansions were being built. These houses were built between the years 1830 and 1860. If you were to take a steam-boat ride down the Mississippi you would perhaps see a few of these old mansions of that day still standing altho' the Mississippi has widened and many have been swept away by the Father of Waters.

“The custom not only on the Mississippi river but on the other rivers anywhere in the southern states was to build the houses back, from a mile or less facing the river situated in grove of trees. At some distance in the rear would be the servants quarters, usually they were between the Master's house and the fields. On some plantations they were arranged in rows across a road giving the road the appearance of a street. They were usually built of brick and lumber, the slaves preferred the log houses or those made of lumber as they felt that the brick held the dampness and caused rheumatism. Each cabin was furnished a small plot of ground for their garden and as a rule, if they sold any thing from it they were given the money. 4 “I started to tell you of the typical colonial houses, they were sit in a grove of trees and facing the river if there were a river with the plantation. These houses had the tall white columns and the porches on each side, the trees were mostly the oak, hickory, and magnolia. As a rule, an avenue led down to the gate which was at least a quarter of a mile from the house. The houses were built from heavy timbers and the chimneys were of brick and mortar. Altho' the work was supervised by an architect the labor was always done by the slaves who belonged to the planter.

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"The whole impression was of stateliness, spacious and grandour. The furnishings were the best that could be afforded and many of these were brought from Europe, since the ships made the port of New Orleans, from there the same as from New York. The beds were the four-poster type with the high posts, it was not an unusual thing for a bed to have posts twelve feet high and the sofas from seven to eight feet long. This was necessary for small furniture in these rooms would have been entirely out of place. A clothes closet was practically an unknown thing, instead large ward-robres and cup-boards of walnut or mahogany were used.

"The plantation families were fond of flowering trees and shrubs, as well as the smaller varieties. The yards and gardens were the private recreation grounds of the family. One [of?] the shrubs which they took great pride in was the Pride of India, this grew quickly and gave luxuriant shade in the summer. Many had botanical gardens and imported sweet oil and tea plants. There were camelias and the spice trees also in these gardens. Other plants were the oleanders, 5 the pomgranetes, the figs and grapes, and the orange trees. There were johquils and hyacinths bulbs that were brought from Holland.

"The air was fragrant with these trees and shrubs as well as from the old fashioned roses. There was the cinamon, the York and the Demascus together with the beautiful Cherokee rose which trailed over the garden wall and was crowded with the jasmine and the honeysuckle. According to the fashion of the times there were arbors where the gentlemen smoked their pipes and the ladies drank their tea. Most of the finest homes stood in the vicinity of a river, most of them facing it. Aside from the appearance this gave it was also a matter of convenience, as the produce was cheaper sent by boat to the market.

"March and April were the months that the farm work was in full swing the grain was first sown and the busy season was in full sway. This was one of the most delightful times on the plantation. The vegetation was springing up and the air was filled with the fragrance of

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the red-bud, dog-wood and the magnolia, while the mocking birds and the red birds sang on every tree.

“Down in the Mississippi bottoms, or other river bottoms if the family, had a summer home or a home in the nearest city they would leave the plantation in May and stay until September to avoid the malaria. The ponds were green and ugly and until the use of quinine was learned, it was common for the malarial fevers to do its deadly work. At the time I am speaking of they had not discovered that the mosquito carried the germs of malaria and the fevers were thought to be from too much exposure from the sun. 6 “The plantation owners were said to have some traits of character in common, among them they were supposed to be brave, truthful and manly, to be less would be considered a disgrace. They were formal in their manner with the courteous ease and poise which only comes from generations of secured position. To the women they were carefully polite; the wives and daughters were as queens to the men. They were quick of temper, proud and passionate, but generous to a fault. Their ruling passion was their honor, in all probability the old saying that “a man's word should be better than his bond, because ungaranteed,” originated with this code of traits of character.

“In the way of recreation there were many entertainments, for the houses were large enough to accomodate everyone of any consequence in the town or community. Most families gave dinners, carpet dances and a grand formal ball every year. The time for the ball was around the Christmas holidays, the dinners and carpet dances were given impromptu on the occasions that they were needed or desired. Nothing gave the slaves any more happiness than the word to go out that “We's gwine hab'a carpet dance up at de Big House tonight”. The rugs and carpets were rolled back and removed, the waxed floors rubbed until they shone like a mirror. The chandeliers with their long glittering crystals drops and the girandoles on the convex mirrors were filled with wax candles. The linen slips from the backs of the chairs were removed and the high carved mantel was decorated with a few boquets placed in tall china or cut glass. The rooms needed no

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decorations with their high ceilings, 7 panelled walls, carved woodwork and long mirrors and family portraits on the walls.

“The whole family, from the youngest to the oldest went to these balls and all who were old enough danced, sedately in a minuet, gaily at the carpet dances. At the formal balls a minuet was usually the opening number led by the most prominent guest of the evening, high and stately, but there was nothing stately at the carpet dances, the grandfathers danced with their grand children, father and sons dances with young and old alike. When the fiddlers struck up “Hands Across and Down the Middle” young and old joined in this dance as happy as little pickinies on a summer day. “As the time drew near for the sets to be called the young men who wished to dance approached the mothers and daughters and asked “if he might be permitted the honor of the next dance”? The maids bowed and looked at her mother or chaperone, and if that lady nodded her head then he was “permitted the next dance”. She replied that she would have the pleasure with just the right tone of reserve.

“The customs and styles had changed from the Revolutionary period, instead of the rich damask, the plumes and the powdered hair, the girls dresses were made of the finest muslin, satins or silks. The skirts were full and short, with the bodies from six to eight inches long. The hair was worn in curls hanging round the neck. The dinners were works of art by the cooks. There were boned turkeys, terrapin stew called “cooter stew”, there were chickens stuffed and baked as well as jellies, creams and pies. Doves would be cooked in nests of fine colored shreds of oranges peelings. Last there would be a tall iced cake with the American flag on the top layer. During the Civil War the Confederate flag was used instead of the stars and stripes.

“There were wines and the old Madira that had been warming and ripening for many a year in cedar shingled garrets, port and rum punch made with pineapple, limes etc. used for appetizers. Of course, the guests enjoyed themselves, but the ones who had the biggest share of the enjoyment were the slaves who had watched with longing the

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preparations for these dances which were given about the holiday season. No master could keep them away from the windows, at every window there were the black faces of the slaves gazing in fascination at the scene. As soon as the company left the big dining hall the slave musicians adjourned with the rest of the slaves belonging to the household where the remains of the feast was carried out with the musicians playing for them until the rising of the sun. I will tell you about the last Christmas before the Civil War which changed this way of living entirely.

“Christmas in the year 1859! The last one just like it on the old plantation. As a child the memory still is with me of how for days before there was the hurry and preparation in both the home of my father and the quarters as well. The family is more than usual itself and for the time there is banishment of the war clouds that were then hanging over the south. I can see our old mammy servant as she brings in the tray of mine to serve to some guests as the older ones ask about the plans for Christmas, for on a plantation Christmas is the most important time of the year. 9 “In the “big house” as the servants called our house, our folks have prepared the candy and the presents for the slaves. It is Christmas eve and the night is warm enough for a tree to be put in the back yard for them. They come from all of the cabins and they play some Christmas songs on their flutes and juice harps. Then the presents were distributed to the house servants first, then to the field servants. There was candy, pocket knives, pipes, dresses, shoes and so on down the list. These presents the slaves acknowledged with a “Thankee”, then after the jug of whiskey was brought and each one of the men given a drink, they marched away for their weeks holiday from work.

“After the departure of the slaves whose voices and laughter could be heard long after the gate was closed, we rushed around to complete preparations for our own guests. They began to arrive in the afternoon from up and down the country. Some had driven for miles in their carriages with their baskets of clothes tied on behind (this was the kind of suitcases of that time.) Some of these carriages were the old style coach with the drivers seat up high in front, and if it were too crowded the maids, who come with their young mistresses would sit with the driver. Other guests came in boats from up and down the river. In the

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bed rooms the maids and mothers of the young ladies would be busy dressing them for the Christmas dinner and dance. After the big dining room was filled and the family and guests had finished their meal, then along came the plantation musicians with a violin, a flute or tambourine. Then the dance begun and they danced until daylight as I have already described to you. 10 "This last Christmas was something for a child as I was, to remember, little did the older ones think it would be the last of its kind and of course we children thought of nothing but the happiness of the season. My information is that the next Christmas, the war being on, some of the old slaves had given up their sons to go with the young Masters, and many did not come home for the holidays, so no one had the heart to have the regular celebration. The children so happy this last Christmas time were not children any more when the war was over. The war had matured even the innocent ones into thoughtful grown-ups, and it was many years before they learned again to be as happy as this last time before the war came.

"When it came, my father and tow of my uncles went to fight for their state. They were in the Mississippi Company of Wayne's rifles and fought in the battle of Nanassas. I do not remember all the battles they were in but my Uncle John was wounded and taken prisioneer in Virginia and sent to a northern hospital. He was still in prison when peace came.

"This uncle was finally sent home from the northern prison after weary months of waiting. Several times during the war there were rumors of negro uprisings but this did not happen, and as a rule they stayed and helped to take care of the plantation when the men were away at the front. I remember how the plantation owners had to give their biggest part of their feed crops to feed their own soldiers and of course when the Union army came down into Mississippi they took what was left. 11 "I will not attempt now to tell you more about the war. I am sure you have heard the story over and over. You have read the story of how they held the siege over Vicksburg and how, when the Union officer Gen. Butler was in New Orleans the people who lived in their path had to refugee. And so in my next interview I will tell you how the ones who came home from the war took up their lives and



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commence the task of reconstruction. Also of my marriage and my leaving my old home for the new country of Texas after I had a family of my own.

“The memory of my first Christmasses lingers with me yet, how, on awakening I could hear the ringing of the old plantation bell with the dawn, the baying of the dogs, and the little black maid as she opens my door with her greeting of “mornin' Misses”, and then in a breath “Christmas Gif’!” May we meet in the sweet bye and bye with her cheerful “Mornin' Miss” and “Happy Chrismus”. 1 [??]

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Interview continued with Mrs. Emma Falconer, Marlin Texas, (White Pioneer

“I was fifteen years old when the war between the states ended and still living with my grandmother in Mississippi. It would be impossible for me to give you an exact picture of conditions at this time. The civil laws of the south were not in operation and the military government that had charge of affairs was not enough to meet the demands made upon it. The negroes had been set free and were supported by the office of the “freedmens buerau”. Many left the plantation on which they were born and went from to place like lost

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sheep expecting to be provided for. Most of them believed that freedom meant idleness and to live as they had seen the wealthier class of whites live.

“Many went to the cities expecting the freedmens bureau to feed and clothe them and this body could not care for all. Therefore, stealing and incendiarism took place. The white people could hardly the slaves were free and the old faithful slaves were still dependent on their former masters for their support. We all know how the unprincipled politicians came down and took charge and deprived the whites who fought in the rebel army from voting and the vote and many offices were given to the former slaves or their off-springs. It was the time of the “carpet bagger rule and scalawags” as they were called.

“There is no doubt but that the indignities that were heaped on the south led to acts of retaliation. C.12 — Tex. 2 When there were political conventions it was these unprincipled politicians that ruled the day, for this reason there were prejudice aroused against the Republican party that to this day has not been entirely overcome by the honesty of later officers of that party.

“There was the union League, a secret political socety that had its branches in most of the southern states, some under different names. They told the slaves their old masters were making arrangements to re-enslave them and this aroused more trouble and caused some of the many unlawful acts of the reconstruction period, it was believed. It was by means of these soceties the negroes were made to believe they were to be given forty acres and a mule. These soceties were offset by the Ku-Klux Klan which was intended to restore order, as well as a protection to the communities which were suffering from these troubles. However the spirit of it was often violated by parties doing unjust things in the name of the Klan.

“When the southern men who were capable leaders gained control of affairs, after several years and much needless expense which the states had been subject to by these politicians who were making their office's an excuse for their own private gains, the

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troubles began to gradually die down. When the northern opinion had become disgusted with the dishonesty that had been practiced in the name of the Republican party there came a welcome end to this humiliating and bitter rule. While both factions were busy trying to solve this problem it solved itself with the help of their former masters. When the negroes saw that they had to go to work to live they let the white man arrange for them to 3 work the land for a part of the crops and their supplies. After all, it was the southern planters who solved the negro problem as it is solved today.

“When I was nineteen years old I married Willis Lang Falconer, he was born in Wayne County Mississippi June 27, 1848. He was a son of Hon. Thomas P. Falconer, a planter and a lawyer, also an owner of slave property, who was elevated to the judgeship of his district. He was married twice, (and my husband was a son by his second marriage) to Miss Jerusha Lang, of Scotch ancestry. This second wife was a sister of Captain Willis and William Lang who settled on a plantation between Waco and Marlin on the Brazos Bottom, and was later inherited by the Billingsley's.

“I must pause here to tell you a little about the Langs. Captain Willis Lang, was first a soldier under General Sam Houston when he was governor, just before the war between the states broke out, and with a company under Captain Ross of Waco went on an Indian scout, hunting the tribes which were giving trouble along the northern border of Texas. After he returned the war was soon declared and he organized a company at Marlin was sent to New Mexico where he met his death at the battle of Val-Verde this company was known as the Fifth Texas Cavalry, Army of the Confederate States of America. The roster of this company contains the names of many ancestors of Marlin residents today.

“His brother William Lang was a master of the State Grange and Patrons of Husbandry for many years. His body lies buried in Cavalry cemetery at Marlin while that of Captain Willis Lang was interred on the Val-Vared battlefield in New Mexico. 4 “My husband Willis Falconer Lang was the only child by this second marriage. He was reared as a member of the family of an Aunt on account of the death of both parents. In 1864 he joined Company

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E. Merman 's battalion, General Wirt Adams brigade. He saw service in a detachment detailed to run down deserters untill near the end of the war. When he was contemplating more arduous service in General Forrest command, the end of the conflict came and he was discharged at Gainsville, Alabama, and returned home.

“After the war he again entered school and obtained most of his education at Pierce's Springs Mississippi near Red Bluff on the Chickasahay River. It was when we lived near this river that I have already given you a description of the way the houses were built and the grounds that faced the river. It was a typical plantation home. Later we lived near Langsdale Mississippi on a plantation also.

“In 1885 his relatives, the Billingsleys, who had come to the plantation on the Brazos Bottom that had belonged to Captain Willis Lang, sent for us and we decided to cast our fortunes in the new country of Texas. Here the plantation life was very much the same as in Mississippi, only it was a wilder and more unsettled country. We lived in Marlin and my husband still farmed on the Billingsley plantation untill he formed a partnership with Mr. Nettles of Marlin when they increased their operations to include ranching on a more extensive scale untill his death in 1929 at the age of 81 years.

“The Brazos Bottom land was the first in this part of Texas to be put in cultivation, the higher land was not thought to be good for anything but grazing for stock. There were lots of ranches both in the bottom and on the prairie country. Most of the work was done by negroes, many had brought their slaves with them before the war came 5 on, and they were still in the community and most of them still with their former owners. When we came we brought fifteen or twenty negro families most of them were decendents of our former slaves.

“From about six miles of Waco starting on the Tehuacana there were families who had settled on plantations down to Marlin, they were first General Harrison, who also came from Mississippi, Dr. W. W. Dunklin, Dr. Bedwell, the Shacklefords, the Mullins, Punchards,

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Billingsleys and the Oakes. Most of these families came either in the Sterling Robertson colony or soon after. We came much later. But even when we came it was in some ways a little wild and unsettled.

“The “Waco Tap” railroad as they called it had just been completed from Houston to Waco. This made Waco the terminus and brought trade from farther west as they brought their produce here to be shipped to Houston to the market. For years Waco, Fort Worth and Dallas were said to be wild cow-boy towns. Everything was what they called wide open, saloons occupied the best business stands. The bars were in front and the gambling dens were in the rear behind saloon doors. A special stunt of the cowboys was to ride into the saloon and shoot a barrel of whiskey untill they could / take a glass and catch their drink, then ride away and the next day return and tell the owner to put his price on the damage. This has happened here in Marlin and some of the oldest families boys have been among the number, but who as they grew to manhood made law-abiding citizens.

“Under the reconstruction period the lawlessness had continued in Texas, theives were numerous and bold and found a secure retreat in the thickets and timber of the Brazos bottom along the Brazos River. Many a man has been trailed and caught here it the bottoms with blood hounds. But it was said that this was changed when the Hon. Richard B. Coke of Waco was made governor and Gen. Sul Rose the Sheriff.

“Another thing that we had to be on the watch for was the Brazos on its floods,. In the years gone by it has flooded the country much worse than now since they have terraced the farms and learned better how to work to hold the floods in check. However it is not so many years since one of the last big floods came and took half the big bridge over the river, about six miles east of Marlin, and with it some of the people who were on it watching the river, among them my son-in-law Dr. Allen of Marlin. It was a sad time, the bodies floated down the river to the bend and then men threw ropes and caught them as they drifted around the bend in the river below Marlin. In the past years the man would have to take their boats and rescue the negroes in the bottom when the river was up.

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However it is this overflow that comes every few years which makes the soil so rich. In days gone by before the worms destroyed the crops the land always made a bale to the acre.

“With it all we were not discouraged, for the country was over the trials of the pioneer days and comforts Were to be had. We had plenty of negroes to help do the hard work just as we did in Mississippi. Some of the decendants of the slaves we brought were still with us. I had ten children and raised eight to be grown. Three sons went to the Phillipines, one Albert died there, another, Theodore, returned, went to the World War, was wounded in action and died later. The oldest is Dr. Beliver Lang Falconer who was director of the Civil Service in the Phillipines, and for many years in the United States held a post in this work. He is retired at his own request and has since made several trips around the world. The last being by air and has written a book called “Flying around the World”. I have one boy living in Marlin and three 7 girls.

“In conclusion let me tell you my impression when I came to Texas and saw the sunrise, the Texas Bluebonnets and the wild flowers, the Indian head, the “Yellow Rose of Texas”, the wild verbens, and all the many beautiful Texas flowers. The traveller may be oblivious to the wonders of his own land and feel that distance lands enchantment, he may grow rapturous over other sunny clines, but if there is a sunnier or more beautiful country then Texas, I have not seen it! The Brazos valley has unequaled or unsurpassed anywhere in the state for its fertility, and I have seen Marlin develop from a mere village to the thriving health resort it now is, and entertains its visiter from all over the United States.